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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAM-01 SAB-01 IO-10 SCCT-01 MC-01 SR-02 ORM-01

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P 071502Z JAN 75
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2200
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0241

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR LE SY
SUBJECT: LEBANESE-SYRIAN CONSULTATIONS

REF: (A) BEIRUT 100; (B) TEL AVIV 057; (C) DAMASCUS 045

SUMMARY: WE THINK GOL IN JAN 7 ASSAD-FRANGIE TALKS WILL STRIVE TO AVOID COMMITTING ITSELF TO ANY ARRANGEMENTS THAT MIGHT LEAD TO CLOSER LEBANESE IDENTIFICATION WITH ARAB "CONFRONTATION" STATES OR GREATER INVOLVEMENT IN CONFLICT WITH ISRAEL. WE FEAR, HOWEVER, THAT DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES IN FAVOR OF SUCH A COURSE WILL ASSUME FAR GREATER PROPORTIONS IN WEEKS AHEAD IF CURRENT ESCALATION OF FEDAYEEN-ISRAELI HOSTILITIES CONTINUES.
END SUMMARY.

1. TODAY'S ASSAD-FRANGIE MEETING AT CHTAURA TAKES PLACE IN ATMOSPHERE CONDITIONED BY STRIDENT AGITATION ON PART OF LOCAL LEFTIST GROUPS, OPPOSITION POLITICIANS AND FAIRLY

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LARGE SEGMENT OF LEBANESE (PRIMARILY MOSLEM) PUBLIC OPINION

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FOR GOL TO DRAW CLOSER TO ARAB "CONFRONTATION" STATES--
PARTICULARLY "SISTER" SYRIA-- IN ORDER ACQUIRE GREATER
PROTECTION FROM, AS WELL AS MEANS TO DEFEND AGAINST,
ISRAELI ATTACKS. THIS AGITATION, WHICH DERIVED MOST
OF ITS MOMENTUM FROM DEC 12 ISRAELI AIR RAID ON BEIRUT,
APPEARS TO BE INCREASINGLY ENCOURAGED BY SARG AND BAATHIST
MEDIA, WITH LATTER DESCRIBING ASSAD'S VISIT AS "EVENT OF
HISTORIC IMPORTANCE" AND CALLING UPON LEBANESE TO RECOGNIZE
THAT THEIR "COMMON DESTINY" LIES IN CLOSER IDENTIFICATION
WITH SYRIA. AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED, PLO PROPAGANDA
APPARATUS HAS ALSO BEEN PLAYING ON SAME THEMES, APPARENTLY
WITH SOME EFFECT. (QUITE APART FROM SYRIAN AMBITIONS VIS-A-VIS
LEBANON, FEDAYEEN HAVE THEIR OWN OBVIOUS MOTIVES FOR WANTING
GOL IDENTIFIED MORE CLOSELY WITH "CONFRONTATION" STATES.)

2. DESPITE ALL THIS HULLABALOO, HOWEVER, RELIABLE SENIOR
LEBANESE MILITARY SOURCE (ARMY G-3 BRIG. KANAAN) ASSURES US
THAT GOL ACCEPTANCE OF ANY SYRIAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN
LEBANON IS "OUT OF THE QUESTION", ALTHOUGH HE EXPECTS ASSAD
WILL PROBABLY RAISE THIS PROPOSAL IN TODAY'S TALKS WITH
FRANGIE. KANAAN DID INDICATE THAT GOL MIGHT BE WILLING
ACCEPT CERTAIN ITEMS OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT (PARTICULARLY
CONVENTIONAL ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS) FROM SYRIA OR OTHER
ARAB SOURCES. HOWEVER, HE QUESTIONED WHETHER SARG IS
REALLY IN POSITION TO SPARE SUCH ITEMS AT CURRENT STAGE
OF ITS CONTINUING EFFORTS TO RE-EQUIP ITS OWN FORCES.

3. KANAAN CONFIRMED THAT STRENGTH OF SYRIAN-BACKED SA'IQA
FEDAYEEN IN LEBANON HAS GROWN IN RECENT WEEKS (USDAO BEIRUT
006 JAN 75), HAVING BECOME MOST VISIBLE IN AND AROUND
BEIRUT REFUGEE CAMPS. HE DESCRIBED SA'IQA AS A "BALLOON"
WHICH SARG CAN INFLATE AT WILL BY DRESSING SYRIAN ARMY
EFFECTIVES IN FEDAYEEN UNIFORMS AND PASSING THEM OFF AS
SA'IQA UNITS IN LEBANON, A PRACTICE WHICH HE POINTED OUT
IS NOT NEW BUT WHICH HAS BECOME MORE EVIDENT HERE SINCE
DEC 12 IAF RAID ON BEIRUT. KANAAN ALSO NOTED THAT "SMALL"
PLA CONTINGENTS HAVE BEEN PRESENT FOR SOME TIME IN REFUGEE
CAMPS AND IN REMOTE RASHAYA DISTRICT NEAR BORDER WITH SYRIA.
LEBANESE ARMY, HE SAID, TRIES TO KEEP TABS ON ALL THESE
PEOPLE AS BEST IT CAN, BUT ITS ABILITY TO CONTROL THEIR
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ACTIVITIES--NOT TO MENTION PREVENTING THEM FROM ENTERING
LEBANON IN GREATER NUMBERS-- IS LIMITED. (FOR MORE DETAILED
ANALYSIS OF THIS PROBLEM, SEE OUR 7698 DATED JULY 4 AND OUR
11970 DATED OCT 2, 1974.)

4. COMMENT: (A) WE BELIEVE GOL IN TODAY'S DISCUSSIONS WITH
SYRIAN LEADERSHIP WILL STRIVE TO AVOID COMMITTING ITSELF TO
ANY ARRANGEMENTS THAT MIGHT LEAD TO CLOSER LEBANESE IDENTI-

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FICATION WITH ARAB "CONFRONTATION" STATES OR GREATER IN-
VOLVEMENT IN CONFLICT WITH ISRAEL. (SINCE LIST OF TOPICS
REPORTEDLY TO BE DISCUSSED BY ASSAD AND FRANGIE INCLUDES,
IN ADDITION TO MILITARY/DEFENSE ISSUE, WIDE ARRAY OF ECONOMIC,
SOCIAL AND OTHER QUESTIONS WHICH TRADITIONALLY AFFECT
LEBANESE-SYRIAN RELATIONS, OCCURS TO US THAT GOL MAY HAVE IT
IN MIND TO SUBMERGE TODAY'S BRIEF TALKS IN SO MUCH EXTRANEOUS
DETAIL AS TO ENSURE THAT MILITARY/DEFENSE ISSUE RECEIVES INSUB-
STANTIAL AND INCONCLUSIVE TREATMENT.) FEAR OF STRONG ISRAELI
REACTION CERTAINLY INFLUENCES GOL THINKING ON THIS SUBJECT.
HOWEVER, ANOTHER-- AND PROBABLY MORE COMPELLING--FACTOR IS LONG-
STANDING RELUCTANCE ON PART OF MANY LEBANESE (MOSTLY CHRISTIANS
BUT ALSO SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF MOSLEMS) TO SEEING THEIR DESTINY
TIED (OR SUBMERGED) TOO COMPLETELY WITH THAT OF
VAST ARAB HINTERLAND. SUCH FEELINGS, IT SHOULD BE NOTED,
OFTEN STEM MORE FROM SECTARIAN, CULTURAL OR EVEN COMMERCIAL
CONSIDERATIONS THAN FROM ANY ABSTRACT ATTACHMENT TO CONCEPTS
OF LEBANESE NATIONHOOD, INDEPENDENCE OR SOVEREIGNTY.

(B) HAVING SAID THIS, WE MUST REITERATE OUR PREDICTION THAT
MORE DIFFICULT TIMES LIE AHEAD FOR GOL IF CURRENT TRENDS
VIS-A-VIS FEDAYEEN, ISRAEL AND SYRIA REMAIN UNCHECKED.
ALTHOUGH LEBANON'S LEADERS MAY SUCCEED IN OUT-RUNNING PRESSURES
FOR CLOSER MILITARY IDENTIFICATION WITH SYRIA FOR TIME BEING,
SUCH PRESSURES CAN BE EXPECTED TO GROW MORE INTENSE AS RELENTLESS
CYCLE OF FEDAYEEN-ISRAELI HOSTILITIES CONTINUES UNABATED AND
THIS COUNTRY EXPERIENCES INCREASED TURMOIL, FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY.

(C) ON BRIGHTER SIDE, WE SHOULD NOTE THAT ASSAD'S PRESENCE
IN CHTAURA TODAY MARKS FIRST OCCASION ON WHICH A SYRIAN CHIEF
OF STATE HAS MADE AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO LEBANON. WERE IT NOT FOR
DISMAL TRENDS AND TURBULENT LOCAL ATMOSPHERE DESCRIBED ABOVE,
MANY LEBANESE WOULD REJOICE TO SEE LEBANON'S INDEPENDENT STATUS
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THUS RATIFIED BY SYRIA'S LEADERS AFTER SO MANY YEARS OF SYRIAN
IRREDENTIST FEELING TOWARD THIS COUNTRY.
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